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EDITORIAL

AN unsigned article in *Science* (June 22) entitled "Sigma Xi at the American Association for the Advancement of Science," calls attention approvingly to a movement to associate meetings of this Greek-letter society with those of the Association. The rapid rise of the Sigma Xi in American universities is cited, and it is affirmed that "as an honor society it promises to take a leading part in our universities in which science holds a prominent place." It is urged that "it has become a representative honor society for the ablest students of science in the institutions where it is established." Respecting its intent, the following authoritative quotation is made: "In establishing a new chapter . . . in each case we should make sure that we entrust the power of distributing the honor of membership only to such persons and institutions as are capable of giving the education and training necessary to the carrying on of scientific investigation."

It is scarcely necessary to make these quotations to show that the fundamental feature of the society is the promotion of a class distinction based on academic preparation. However laudable this may be, in itself considered, it would seem to be inharmonious with the fundamental purpose of the Association, which is the development and dissemination of science among all people without regard to race, age, sex, or previous condition of intellectual servitude. From professional relations the writer should not be inappreciative of the value of university training and of academic achievement. Nevertheless, it seems to him that the purposes of the Association are unqualifiedly democratic and that the spirit of science is equally so, and that therefore the only distinctions which the Association should foster or sanction, if it fosters or sanctions distinctions at all, are those which are based solely upon scientific productiveness. And this productiveness should be honored quite irrespective of its connection

with the fortunate conditions of academic appointments and opportunities, or with the adverse or even hostile conditions under which much good science has been developed. The movement therefore to connect the meetings of the Sigma Xi with those of the Association seems incongruous.

As set forth in another article in the same number of *Science*, some fifteen special scientific societies have already become correlated with the Association and have much increased the complexity of the proceedings. This movement seems to be an inevitable consequence of the differentiation of scientific work, and is scarcely less than necessary to the continued success of the Association, but it has already brought some inevitable conflict of interests and not a little congestion of programs and appointments. Between these and the increased number of social functions, it has already come to pass that there is little time left for that personal conference and that informal sociability whose basis is "shop talk," which formed so large a factor in the attractiveness of the earlier meetings of the Association. If now in addition to these laudable complications, the attention of a considerable number of the members of the Association is to be diverted in the interest of an academic honor society and a precedent established for the meeting of other societies whose basis is not strictly congenial to that of the Association, it is not clear where the limit of congestion will be found.

Between the lines of the article referred to, the imagination is tempted to read a hint of a desire for that rank and dominance in the Association which the members of Sigma Xi attained in university circles, and it is not unnatural to anticipate that the fraternity might unconsciously play a part in Association politics not unlike that for which Greek-letter societies are famous throughout the university world. To those who pride themselves upon rank and band themselves together because of rank it is not unnatural that official expressions of rank should be sought through the unconscious influence of fraternization.

It is not altogether foreign to the subject of this discussion to note the increasing encroachments of formal social functions

upon the meetings of the Association and not less perhaps upon the meetings of the Geological Society of America. Without doubt a certain measure of formal contact with general society is helpful to the ends sought by the Association. At the same time it must be recognized that formal social functions are largely the province of the leisure class and that from the very nature of the case they must remain so, for leisure and the means of leisure are prerequisites to their effective cultivation. Equally from the nature of the case, the devotees of science do not usually belong to the leisure class because real success in science involves strenuous endeavor and an almost unlimited devotion of time. The diversion of time to social functions during the meetings of the Association should, therefore, be zealously watched and restrained within limits which are compatible with the efficient conduct of the primary purposes of the Association. Particularly is this true of the Geological Society which has no organic relation to general society. The movement in the direction of social formality has already crowded hard upon the point where the first requisite preparation for a meeting of the Association or of the Geological Society is the packing of a dress suit, and the second is the preparation of an after-dinner speech, preparations that are none too congenial to the great mass of hard workers in science.

T. C. C.